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TABUK AND OTHER MILITARY FACILITIES IN NORTHWEST SAUDI ARABIA

-- Tabuk, 125 miles within Saudi territory and long one of Saudi Arabia's army camps, is the only significant defense installation in the northwest region, i.e., north of Jidda and west of Riyadh. It consists of both army and air force facilities.

ARMY

-- The site was redeveloped in 1972 to house infantry elements, the French armor school, the airborne school, a basic training center and air defense units. Construction is continuing on certain support areas in the Army section, such as family housing.

AIR FORCE

-- The Saudis have said they do not plan to station their F-15s at Tabuk and there are no plans to improve the base's infrastructure. Saudi F-15's will be based at Dhahran, Taif, and Khamis Mushayt.

-- The Saudi air base at Tabuk is an expansion of the civilian airport which has been used by the civil airline since the early 1960s. In 1974, a British firm completed additional facilities which permit support for a squadron of Lightning interceptors. The air base was built according to British standards specifically for the Lightning. In addition to providing defense against a possible attack from this sector, the air base allows the Saudis to disperse aircraft more widely in the event of an attack from other quarters.

-- Any airfield with the necessary runway length and basic support such as fuel can be used on a short-term basis as a Forward Operating Base. The Saudis could "forward deploy" limited numbers

of F-15s at Tabuk for a short period of time by pre-positioning necessary fuel, spares and ground support equipment. F-15s, however, require frequent servicing which ordinarily is available only at main operating bases.

-- It is another question entirely to assign aircraft on a permanent basis to a new base. The F-15 could not be assigned to Tabuk as a Main Operating Base unless significant modifications and improvements were made in the base infrastructure. These changes would include construction of new aircraft shelters, additional maintenance shops, operations facilities, increased fuel and munitions storage, enhanced navigation aids, and increased communications -- all of which would have to be built to American standards specifically designed for the F-15.

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-- New asphalt strips have been constructed near Turayf and Gurayat to replace old dirt strips. This is part of a country-wide program to improve civil aviation and has limited military application; primarily as a runway for emergency landings. There are no military air base facilities at either of these civilian airfields and none planned. Fighter aircraft could not effectively operate from either field.

-- The existing airfield at al Jouf is undergoing limited improvements for further use as an RSAF disperal field, but again will lack the infrastructure necessary for permanent deployments, except possibly a refueling stop under emergency conditions.

-- The Saudi air field at Hail is located in north-central Saudi Arabia, about 310 kilometers northwest of Riyadh and 900 kilometers southeast of Israel. A civilian air field with a 3,300 meter runway has existed at Hail for a number of years. There are no military units now assigned to Hail. Saudi Arabia is undertaking a program to improve the air field for contingency use as an RSAF emergency operations/dispersal base. Similar improvements are taking place at fields in Saudi Arabia's west-central and southwestern regions. These improvements were begun during the fall of 1978 and should be completed in the near future. While the Saudis could theoretically operate limited numbers of F-15s or other fighter aircraft from Hail for short periods of time by deploying personnel, spare parts, and support equipment from one of the Main Operating Bases, the F-15 could not be assigned there on a long term basis as a Main Operating Base unless significant modifications and improvements were made in base infrastructure beyond those already underway. These changes would have to include additional maintenance shops, operations facilities, increased fuel and munitions storage, enhanced navigation aids, increased communications, and additional housing.

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-- F-15 aircraft without conformal fuel tanks could theoretically strike Israel by staging from areas of Northern Saudi Arabia (other than Tabuk) without the use of conformal fuel tanks. This would, however, be highly impractical. The addition of conformal fuel tanks would increase somewhat (though not radically) the operational practicability of a strike

at Israel, but would not significantly degrade those factors militating against such a strike.